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# RAINBOW DATES · TOYAH

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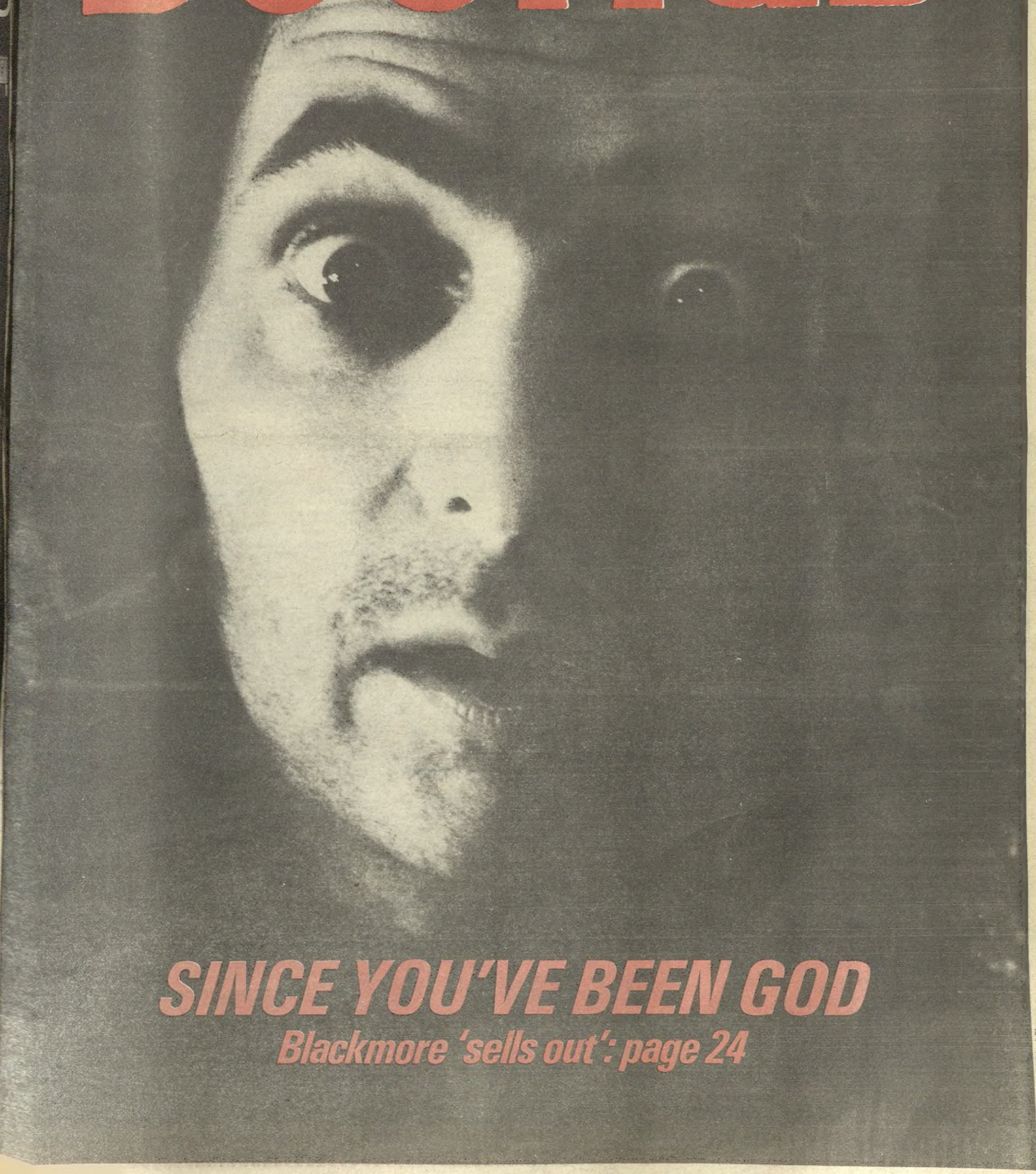

## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GOD

Blackmore 'sells out': page 24

RITCHIE BLACKMORE: pic by LFI

# The Man In (the) Black

## Rainbow's albums, Deep Purple, Ronnie Dio, rock and roll and even Life itself all come under the hammer as Ritchie Blackmore gives his frankest-ever interview to SYLVIE SIMMONS in Los Angeles

**"NO MATTER what he does", Ronnie Dio once said of Blackmore, "Ritchie always comes out all right. If he fell into a vat of shit he'd turn out to be wearing a rubber suit."**

What usually happens is that Blackmore just tries to avoid the shit as much as possible, especially the vat of the stuff affectionately known as the music business, and anyway, rubber suits just don't happen to be a particular perversion of a guitarist who's into regression and reincarnation but doesn't chose to return to the 15th century because they didn't have a cure for syphilis in those days, even if he could upset the status quo by playing long and heavy metal solos on the lute.

Like the audience at tonight's show, Blackmore is strictly a whisky-and-woman man, I gather, who likes observing people from the vantage point he's created by his image as a moody bastard, and putting them on the spot when he meets them face to face.

The waitress in the Smugglers Inn bar is treated to a monologue about the cancer-causing agents in the beers she has to offer.

He has a dark sense of humour: sort of Monty Python on voodoo. I sense a predilection for torturing small animals at an early age. "Actually I threw stones through people's windows and fought a lot". I stand corrected.

We are in a disco bar full of rednecks in cowboy hats in Fresco, California, self-proclaimed Raisin Capital of the World, in a hotel eight miles from the Hilton where the rest of Rainbow are sitting in another disco bar full of rednecks in cowboy hats. Rainbow do not usually stay in separate hotels, Blackmore claims.

It's just when he heard on the aeroplane that the Hilton boasted a disco bar he opted for the alternative which proved to be even more of a knockout by the end of the evening. An interview punctuated with full-volume Chic and Village People.

Fortunately Rainbow, earlier, proved to play a far more interesting show. Graham Bonnet, looking like Bob Halford in a Moss Bros ad, hit notes that must have surprised even perfectionist Ritchie. Don Airey provided the odd flight of classical fancy on his own at the keyboards, complementing Blackmore perfectly.

Roger Glover played studiously well, and Cozy, holding the track record for the longest run with Rainbow since Dio was given his cards, bashed hell out of the drums as always, upstaging the cannons during his Tchaikovsky's 1812 stint.

And Ritchie? At times bloody inspiring, and the rest of the time there's always the bar to go to. Histrionic, grand, eloquent, dark and dramatic.

"It comes from Europe, drama. Americans don't have drama. They have cowboy hats instead."

Which brings us neatly back to the hotel bar and a couple of Heinekens.

THE LAST time Rainbow toured the States they were playing the underdog role, one that Blackmore loves to squeeze every last sympathetic drop out of. In 50 minute sets around the country they supported, often upstaged, REO Speedwagon without benefit of flashbin or backdrop.

This time they're headlining, partly for the added financial reward and partly because they're on their way to their first big A.M. (the more commercial top 20-style radio) hit in America. Ushered into Polydor's L.A. office before making the trek northwards to the Raisin Capital, I was shown top secret radio figures that showed that 'Since You've Been Gone' had been added to more stations that week than any other record, a fact that the press officer was particularly enthralled about.

He also showed me an extremely tacky video of Rainbow performing said song with a young lady of quite nice proportions contorting herslf in the wings in a glitter tank top while the band played on. It all adds up to Big Dollars.

"I haven't heard anybody say this yet", muses the expatriate guitarist, now resident on the East Coast, "But I'm ready for it: People are going to start saying, 'Rainbow's sold out.'

"When I heard the song — our manager played it to me round his house — I said, 'that's a good pop tune'. He said, 'you want to do it?' I said, 'yes, I wouldn't mind, I think it could be a hit."

It is on such trifling conversations that history — and money — is made.

"You see, I'm the type of person . . . I love to record something like that because when they turn round and say, 'you sold out' I get rather conceited. I come on like, 'yeah, I sold out, but you watch this'. If people think we've sold out then they should come to the show — I think that says it all. We did 'Since You've Been Gone' tonight, but it's the first time in about a week.

"I just thought it was a very good pop song, and I'm in that stage where I will record and play anything I want to. I will not be dictated to by fans or people who say, 'you shouldn't do that, you should do this.'"

THERE WILL of course be those who say that Blackmore *is* being dictated to — by the particular commercial tastes of the record-buying public in the country they've been trying to break for some time. Rainbow making music for American postmen to whistle ?

"Yeah, that's right. But I think we can make music for other people too. To me it really doesn't make any difference. If I thought we couldn't make other music — which I find as easy as falling off a log — heavy music is very simple music. I believe that some of the solos I play are — good. But as for the riffs and the actual songs and the progressions and the vocal line and what it has to say — it's five-year-old's stuff, basically.

"I like popular music. I like Abba very much. Enjoy them. But there's so much stigma involved with it — like, 'you can't do this because you're a heavy band' and I think that's rubbish. You should do what you want. Like some nights I know people have come to see me break the guitar up, so I purposely won't. I'll just stand there. I love to aggravate people sometimes. I think this single is aggravating the Europeans really well — great! They all hate me anyway, so this just adds to it."

Paranoia? "No, not paranoia. I'm just living up to my image of 'he's a nasty guy'. Yes, I'm a nasty guy, AND I also play pop music." Added to which he is totally unfazed that his biggest success is with the only song on the album he didn't have a hand in writing.

"This may sound condescending", he says (actually it sounds pretty honest) "but I really don't take this business too seriously. I take life very seriously, but not the music business."

THERE IS one big reason why Blackmore can keep his distance from the whole charade. No, not money (make that two reasons). But because of his general attitude towards the worth (or lack or it) of rock and roll music. Most of it is bullshit, he claims. It passes the time and beats working for a living, but that's about it.

"Music has a meaning. But not rock and roll." he makes no exceptions. "Rainbow is just another band, that's it." He doesn't see it as an art.

"I have so much respect for classical musicians that when I listen to myself I think, oh, that's nonsense. I can put down other people's music because the fact is I put down my own music and say it's rubbish. A lot of it is — not all of it ('No Time To Lose' definitely is, he says; 'Eyes Of The World' is okay) but a good deal of it is a waste of time."

What isn't rubbish — you guessed! — is classical music, "which is why I keep telling people to listen to it. I think classical music is very good for the soul. A lot of people go, 'ah, well, classical music is for old fogies," says Blackmore, 34, who can remember the Queen's coronation and the invention of 7-Up.

"It's not on, man, because it's not exciting'. But I was exactly the same. Sixteen years old and I didn't want to *know* about classical music; I'd had it rammed down my throat. But now I feel an obligation to tell the kids, 'look, just give classical music a chance."

YES, Ritchie wasn't always a classics fan, though it's all he listens to today; *real* music. He didn't take up guitar at the age of 11 because of his brief background in the classics. He simply liked its shape (sort of wooden Diana Dors) "it was such a beautiful instrument and nice to just touch.

"I wanted to be like Tommy Steele, who used to just jump around and play. I thought, this is the life. This has nothing to do with people trying to educate me or tell me how I should grow up. My dream was that one day they'd say, 'well Richard was a terrible pupil but he sure knows how to play a guitar'.

"The only thing I have in common with so-called punk people, who I'm not interested in at all, is that I didn't like my childhood too much, other than my parents, and I loathed school. To this day — maybe onstage, even, when I'm breaking up a guitar I'm thinking of my teachers. I hated them.

"They were bastards, mentally retarded some of them. I thought I'm not going to take orders and I'm certainly not inspired to learn anything from somebody who's mental, because maybe I'll grow up just like him, and I resented the fact that maybe I'll look like that and be like that. So I used to steer clear — I used to be a bully at school to a certain extent, always fighting."

Never exactly the stocky type young Richard just gave the other kids the evil eye, start as you mean to go on in life.

"I didn't smile at school either, so I was considered to be evil. For some reason I was feared, I don't know why. I fought a lot just because it was the in thing to do."

In the evenings he would exercise his famous wrist *(Careful — Ed)* tossing stones from his back garden into the windows of neighbours' houses at a great distance, always denying it on the basis that he didn't have that kind of strength.

He quit school at 15, "couldn't wait", and left the suburbs of Weston-Super-Mare at 18 for Germany where he played behind Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis, and lead guitar in the wings for Screaming Lord Sutch, "just playing in bands and living off immoral earnings, actually."

A job working on radio at London Airport followed — not making plane arrival announcements, but servicing aircraft equipment and using the spare time when everyone else went home to families or did some moonlighting for making a guitar and playing in a band, working off his Tommy Steele complex.

In Deep Purple it was always Jon Lord who was associated with the band's more classical leanings, while Ritchie did for Purple what Cozy does for Rainbow — uphold the values of straight-down-the-line hard rock and roll.

"I was not into classical music then", Ritchie recalls. "Those were the days when I was very very moody and I just wanted to play very very loudly and jump around a lot. I couldn't *believe* we were playing with orchestras. We kept getting lumbered playing with them. And I went, *'what is this?!* They have no sympathy for our type of music'.

"We started off in '68 very briefly — this is my opinion — as a relatively competent band with a lot to say but saying it all at the same time as each other.

"In '69 we went into the classical stuff because it was Jon Lord's big thing to write a concerto for a group and orchestra. He was very sincere. But I didn't like playing it or respect the fact that we were doing it. The orchestra was very condescending towards us, and I didn't like playing with them, so it was one big calamity onstage. But Jon was happy with it and the management was happy with it because we had a press angle, which I resented very much.

"In 1970 I said, 'right, we're going to make a rock and roll LP. If this doesn't succeed I'll play in orchestras for the rest of my life', because Jon wasn't too into hard rock. When we made it I said, this is a personal statement from me. We put it out and luckily it took off, so I didn't have to pay with orchestras any more.

"I love orchestras, chamber music — unaccompanied violin is my favourite. But I respected them too much, and we just weren't in the same calibre. I'd been playing 15 years at the time, and stuck next to some dedicated violinist who's been playing for 50 years just to give an angle to the press — it's insulting. That's why it started and ended very abruptly . . .

ABOUT '73, '74 I became very classical oriented. Classical musicians are not doing it because they know they're going to be Number One next week. Classical music is just a release. One thing about it is that Bach and Beethoven didn't have to pander to their fans, public and record companies and record magazines and all that bullshit that goes down today. They just played."

I thought they had to have rich patrons and please wealthy ladies with large bosoms in order to survive. Ritchie concedes that much ("I'm all for large bosoms; always have been") with "you can almost hear in the music that they didn't have to pander to the public tastes or have people writing about them and stuff. They could get on with it the way they wanted."

The fact that if everyone took his advice and listened only to the classics, seeing Rainbow and rock and roll for what they really are, he'd be out of a job, leaves him unfazed.

"I know it sounds very corny, but all I want to do is play my guitar — just play a few solos. Forget music. All I do is go home and practice my scales and think the whole business is fucked. I'm still playing guitar and I haven't progressed at all from the day I started playing — not politically, socially or musically, exciting a few people hopefully, but there's no big message and no deep and hidden meanings.

"I just play off the top of my head — looking around me at other people I play pretty well — and I enjoy playing, though the guitar frustrates me a lot because I'm not good enough to play it sometimes so I get mad and throw a moody. It's very hard to be honest about that because people go, 'ah no, he's a capitalist, he's made a lot of money out of the guitar, it's all wrong.'

"Sometimes I feel that what I'm doing is not right, in the sense that the whole rock and roll business has become a farce, like Billy Smarts Circus, and the only music that ever moves me is very disciplined classical music, which I can't play.

"But there's a reason I've made money. It's because I believe in what I'm doing, in that I do it my way — I play for myself first, then secondly the audience — I try to put as much as I can in it for them. Lastly I play for musicians and the band, and for critics not at all."

IN A concluding spech guaranteed to bring tears to the eyes of Polydor Records, Ritchie claims Rainbow's albums — much the same as any rock album — should never have been recorded, least of all purchased by fans.

"I believe recording is barbaric to rock and roll bands. They should never be recorded. They should just be seen onstage and everybody should have a little tape recorder and tape their own version.

"There's a lot of boredom with myself and what the band puts out. I'm kind of excited with what we do for about the first ten minutes that we do it, but by the time it gets to the mix I've had enough and I don't want to hear it any more. It's something I can't come to terms with in myself and I'm still fighting it.

"I haven't yet found a way of recording the way I play and what I stand for — ever. By chance you can fall over something in the studio (blame it on the 5000-year-old Babylonian demon they claim haunted the chateau where they recorded, which turned off tapes and regularly lowered the volume during Ritchie's solos) but in general — unless you're someone like Queen who have perfected it — I'm in a mess recording.

"I'm playing to one sound engineer and one producer maybe as my audience, and I'm not really inspired by him at 4 o'clock in the morning when we've both been drinking. Boredom is a hard thing to cope with."

BOREDOM is one of the reasons cited for the shuffling around of Rainbow recently. But the main reason for the depature of original member Ronnie Dio was the same he gives whenever someone disappears.

"If they were good enough, they'd still be in the band. I'm not putting down the other members who were in the band, but no-one has ever left Rainbow. Not that that's such a big deal, but it's a fact. Not a confrontation, just, well you ▶

*RAINBOW Mk.5 (or is it 6?). From left: Ritchie, Cozy, Graham Bonnet, Don Airey, Roger Glover*

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didn't quite make it, you'll have to do other things."

So how come Ronnie, who is good from '75-'79, suddenly becomes not so good on the verge of 1980?

"Ronnie is a very good singer — I still like him — but he was becoming very lackadaisical. I'm sure if he was here now he would argue the point, but the fact is, Ronnie was not contributing what he should have done, and he knows that.

"For the last two years I would put down the riff, the progressions, give him the basic melody and he would write the lyrics. I found that in the past year he wasn't really doing that.

"He was, for want of a better word, *bitching*. About the fact that it was always *Ritchie Blackmore's* Rainbow. And I'm going, look, I've tried after three years to make it just Rainbow, not *my* Rainbow. After a while I think he became bitter about it, I don't know for sure. With all this bitching we weren't making any music.

"When people leave the band we don't give too many reasons because we don't want to hinder their career when they go onto other things. But if someone's not pulling their weight I will not put up with somebody who's second-rate.

"I'm not going to jump onstage and say, 'it's alright ladies and gentlemen, I know they're not very good but they are my friends' like most bands do. It's like, wow, I'm in a rock band now, so I've gotta act like I'm in a rock band and go down to Tramps and Speakeasy and act like a fool and take drugs.

"A couple of people in the band were taking quite a few drugs and consequently falling asleep while they were playing because they'd been partying all night. I gave them the sack. It's incredible how those people react. They turn round and say, 'how dare he do that to *me*?' But what have they got to offer other than looking the part?"

I suggest that not every fan at a concert would particularly care if Ronnie Dio uttered a bum note.

"A lot of rock and roll is about bum notes, but you have to make those bum notes exciting. Unfortunately I have a musical mind, and if I hear a wrong note behind me I go crazy. I can't give the fans what they want if I hear the bass out of tune or the singer singing a bad note. I get my energy from the audience, and being aware of the music behind me — oh and a drop of scotch too."

No drugs, but plenty of debauchery. Yes, he's happy with Don with his classical and jazz background. Yes, former Purple-ite Roger fits in nicely and takes off some of the pressure, being quite the "ideas man".

And yes, Graham Bonnet was definitely quite a find, his voice and appearance adding a new dimension to Rainbow. He was found after lengthy auditions where all the singers were performing for him "in this monotone minor third thing that punk people are into" and he despaired of finding anybody appropriate.

RITCHIE BLACKMORE loves his guitar, as much as it is possible to love an instrument. "In my moments of despair I can always turn to the guitar, pick it up and play certain things on it and have a rapport with it." The ones he smashes hell out of "deserve it" as examples of bad workmanship. He seeks them out.

"They're quite expensive, in fact. I get a great deal of satisfaction out of breaking up a bad guitar. It's the ultimate, like the end of the show. Bang!"

A bit like smiling through a party then turning round at the end and saying rude things to all the guests, he opines, back to the old Bad Guy image.

"Then of course people would leave me on my own. I like my own solitude, and though I'm really a very silly person I like to be silly by myself or with the same old people.

"As far as music goes, what I don't like is getting involved with record companies and music papers and the whole business thing. And dressing rooms and all that goes with it is very very difficult for me to handle because you have to be very predictable. You can't be yourself."

So does he sit by himself in his hotel room reading Beethoven manuscripts while the rest of the band live the proverbial life of rock and roll debauchery?

"Actually it should be Bach, and I am the one who usually gets into debauchery of that sort. I like to get involved in the utmost filth and debauchery there is."

He's half involved in the occult, voodoo, hypnotism, having atended LA's 'hip hypnotist' Pat Collins's self-hypnosis classes, but never regressed into a previous incarnation "because I want to find the answers to things without completely blowing my head off.

"I am a realist — there's your angle. But I thrive on people thinking I'm a pessimist because people today go round with this big paper smile on their faces saying 'oooh, isn't life wonderful'. Life is not wonderful. Life is a drag sometimes. And how can someone be sincerely happy with life while death looms up behind them at any moment?"

HI FASHION